The Gentle Jesus and the Stern Jesus

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When we carefully read the four Gospels, which record Jesus' teachings and life story, we see that Jesus displayed an indescribably gentle side and also an uncompromisingly stern side. These contrasting attitudes depended entirely on the people with whom He was dealing. It seems that Jesus distinguished among the people around Him and responded accordingly.

One distinction was whether people were Jews or Gentiles. Jesus regarded the Jews as those who had been given the Law—that is, those who had received God's teaching—and He regarded the Gentiles as those who had not. To the Jews, who had received God's teaching, He often responded with sternness. To the Gentiles, who did not know God or His commandments, He responded patiently and gently.

But this was not merely a broad distinction of ethnicity. Jesus also looked carefully into each person's background. Even among the Jews, He differentiated between those who had ample opportunity to study the Law and the ordinary people who had little chance to do so. To those with the privilege of learning the Law—the priests and their families (the Sadducees), the Pharisees known for their strict religious discipline, and the scribes who specialized in copying Scripture—Jesus was exceedingly stern. Yet to ordinary people of low status who had little opportunity to study the Law, Jesus responded with great patience and gentleness. Similarly, even among the Gentiles, those who were intoxicated with their power and position were met with sternness from Him.

Furthermore, regardless of ethnicity, class, sect, or education, Jesus was stern toward those who failed to acknowledge their own weakness and sin, or who hid it, pretending to be righteous. He exposed their hypocrisy with indignation. But toward those who felt the weight of their weakness and sin, who grieved and were crushed by it, He responded with deep compassion.

Even so, we also see that toward hypocritical Jewish religious elites, Jesus ultimately approached them with profound gentleness. His sternness was never to

punish or condemn them to destruction, but to awaken them to their weakness, sin, and defilement, to lead them to repentance, and to bring them to salvation. Jesus, the only Son of the heavenly Father who makes the sun rise and the rain fall on both the good and the evil, did not come to condemn sinners and bring punishment. Rather, He came to bear their sins, to die in their place, and to bring them salvation. He gave up His divine form, came into this world as a man, suffered as a man, and was killed on the cross as a man's substitute.

We, however, often imitate Jesus' sternness without remembering that He was prepared to die for those very people to whom He was stern. When we are harsh with others, do we carry that same readiness? And how do we see ourselves?

Let us train our eyes so that we may see people as Jesus did, and interact with them as He did. For example, how did Jesus deal with the priestly class, who despised Him, doubted Him relentlessly, and harbored murderous intent? How did He respond to many of the Pharisees and scribes who saw their hypocrisy exposed by His teaching and wanted Him dead? Yet how did He treat Mark and his mother Mary, who were relatives of a high priestly family? Why did He choose to treat them differently? What about Nicodemus, the learned Pharisee? Or the rich young ruler, who from childhood had lived an exemplary life yet likely carried a Pharisaic outlook—how did Jesus respond to him?

And how did Jesus treat the woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years and came to Him? Or the Gentile woman who pleaded for her daughter's healing? What about the Roman centurion's son? And Zacchaeus, who had become a collaborator of Rome, amassing wealth through unjust taxation, and was despised as a sinner—what did Jesus do for him? And Levi (Matthew), another tax collector despised as a sinner, and his friends—how did Jesus respond to them? What about the woman caught in adultery, dragged before Him—how did He treat her?

Even among those who followed Him, when some easily declared, "Lord, we will follow You wherever You go," how did Jesus reply? And though He deeply loved Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead, and his two sisters, why did He not choose Lazarus as one of His closest disciples?

Moreover, Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went up to pray. The Pharisee boasted in his upright life and thanked God that he was not

like the sinner beside him. Meanwhile, the tax collector, overwhelmed by his sin, could not lift his face, but beat his chest and begged for mercy. And it was the sinner, not the Pharisee, who went home justified and blessed by God. We must consider carefully the meaning of this parable. How do we see ourselves? And how do we see our neighbors?

Jesus also told the story of the beggar Lazarus, who survived on scraps from a rich man's table. Both men died: the rich man was cast into fiery judgment, while Lazarus was carried to Abraham's side. What was the purpose and intention of Jesus in telling this story? Let us think deeply on it.